

The background of the cover is a close-up photograph of a chessboard. The top half shows a dark wood and light wood checkered board with several black and white pawns. The bottom half shows a similar board with a black king, a white king, and several white pawns. A semi-transparent white banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title and author information.

# Chess Sets Guide

2020 edition

Raphael Neff

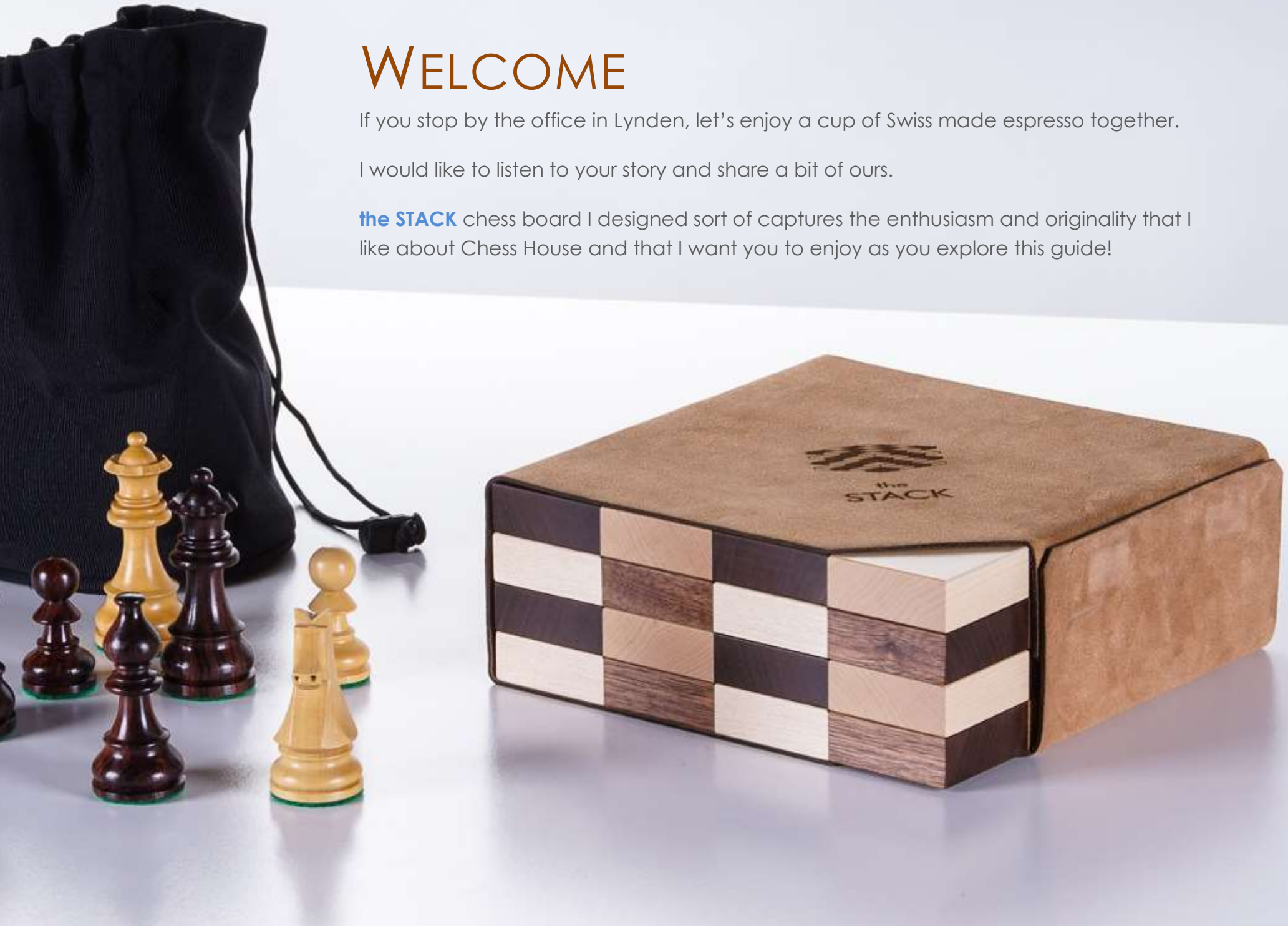
CHESS HOUSE  
USA HANDCRAFTED

# WELCOME

If you stop by the office in Lynden, let's enjoy a cup of Swiss made espresso together.

I would like to listen to your story and share a bit of ours.

**the STACK** chess board I designed sort of captures the enthusiasm and originality that I like about Chess House and that I want you to enjoy as you explore this guide!



# WHY THIS GUIDE?

Before discovering Chess House, people often say how overwhelming it is to sort through websites for hours attempting to find a suitable chess set. Since writing this guide, I'm thrilled to say that it has helped so many people save time, money, and hassle - AND have fun on the journey.

Now the 7<sup>th</sup> edition since 2007, it has helped many thousands of people like yourself find their ideal set. You'll more confidently choose an appropriate chess set for the home, class, club, business, or nearly any purpose.

I wrote this guide for two reasons. First, to help you **become familiar** with the **interesting uses** for different styles of chess sets and second, to enable you to select a suitable set while **avoiding frustrations** that people often encounter when buying online.

Since my chess journey started at 8 years old, I now have kids of my own discovering chess. It has been a life-long pursuit and passion to provide you with the most **exceptional** line of chess products along with the things you'll experience that set Chess House apart.

**YOU** will make a difference in yours and other's lives with this game. And I'm honored to play a part and help.

Raphael Neff  
owner, co-founder and fellow enthusiast

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# ARTISTS

One of the most interesting areas of Chess House is relationships with exclusive [Artists](#), especially those whose stories we feel deserve to be heard.

My favorite example is Carolyn Cavanaugh. Her dream of turning her craft into a chess set that people could enjoy in their homes became a reality with Chess House.

Her story of the distinctive and original [House of Hauteville](#) chessmen is remarkable. Historians and collectors may notice a shadow of resemblance to the iconic Isle of Lewis chessmen, notably the pawn characters peering over the shields.

The House of Hauteville chessmen are paired beautifully here with the breathtaking [Queen Anne](#) chess board, one of the finest examples of our [Heirloom Collection](#) sets built on the hardwood boards of this line.

The chess board belongs to a line of JLP boards that are finished to perfection. Our craftsman pours his heart into each chess board with remarkable precision resulting in this breathtaking finish that exudes quality. It's just one example of JLP hardwood products reaching players and collectors throughout the world. In fact, the JLP boards have become so popular that this close relationship with Chess House enables the craftsman to support his family while operating his woodworking shop in the Eastern U.S.A.



# YOUR CHOICE OF A CHESS SET

Chess is an art and you have the freedom of creativity. However, having a basic understanding of some widely accepted standards can be helpful. Over the years, these standards have been developed and published by the US Chess Federation as well as FIDE, the worldwide governing body.

## STANDARDS

A “**Regulation**” size chess set is suitable for many uses - tournaments, clubs, scholastic chess, home-study, and personal use. It is recognized **anywhere** and saves you the embarrassment of arriving with an inadequate set for chess club.

This “**club**” chess set has a **King 3 ¾” tall**, a chessboard with a **square size of 2 ¼”**, and is usually **20” square** overall. Most often the pieces will be plastic, with or without extra weight, and the chess board green and white. Although you can choose from an array of board colors, green is relaxing to the mind, enables better concentration, and is most widely used.

Starting with a **basic, all-purpose** set as shown, there are many regulation **club chess sets** that will be suitable in this category, perfect for kids and families as well as any kind of scholastic and club chess.



**Wood Chess Sets** in “Staunton” design also meet regulation standards but are more visually appealing and enjoyable to play.

Rarely are they used in scholastic events. Most often, they are found in homes, clubs, and adult tournaments. Many players like to bring a wooden set to their chess club, provided it is of a standard size and design as shown here.

The **Timeless Chess Set** is one of the best examples. It has been played on the international scene for decades. With a King between 3 ¾" and 4" tall, it's a robust set ideal for chess players seeking a wooden chess set for casual and club chess games.



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**Did you know?** Rules of chess require **Staunton Design** chess pieces be played in tournaments. The origin is an 1849 pattern by English chess master Howard Staunton. Today, however, “Staunton” loosely refers to chess pieces of a general style and proportion familiar to most people. For example, the Timeless design shown above.

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## A FIRST CHESS SET

While you may own chess sets unique to how and where you will play the game, multi-purpose **club chess sets** are the primary go-to sets for every day play. These inexpensive, rugged sets are better than most cheap, hollow plastic sets that a local store might offer. Because they are hard to find in stores, most people shop for them online.

Between online sellers, the quality varies widely. The same “basic” chess set may be cheap quality from one seller, and high quality from another. As a rule, we source the higher quality product because we want you to know you are getting the best available value for the price.

For younger players, the club style chess set is the ideal first set. They fit the hand well with some weight and plenty of arm movement providing the tactile feedback the brain needs to reinforce learning.

The **basic club chess set** is also designed to store easily with a rollup board. Conveniently, both are stored together as a portable **chess set combo**.

If you to take this chess board to a club or event or just play with someone who is familiar with chess, you'll be using the standard setup already.

If you lose a piece you'll **easily obtain replacements** from Chess House. That's going to be a pain when you buy at Amazon or a store not specializing in chess.





# STYLE FOR THE OCCASION

As you journey through your chess experience or shop for someone, there are many styles to consider.

**Let's explore some of them!**



## TRAVEL

Playing chess while traveling means your game can be interrupted at any time. You will prefer something lightweight that can easily fit in a pocket, purse, or pack.

The smallest, a [pocket chess set](#), with a tri-fold design, and 2D printed pieces, has an ultra-thin profile, like a checkbook. Many teachers like to gift these to students.

Top rated in Travel is the [9" Milled Leather](#). It's the perfect combination of portability and ultra-playable miniature and magnetic pieces on a soft leather chessboard. Real wood pieces with magnets hold to the chessboard making chess play while traveling more than easy - they are eye-catching and fun to play. The set is complete with a black fabric pouch for both the pieces and the entire set. Here's it's shown at Boulevard Park in Bellingham, Washington.

One of many reviewers, Matt says, "Simply put, this is the coolest travel/magnetic set out there."

What if you really want a set that closes and **saves your chess position** to continue playing where you left off? Then you need the [Play Keeper](#).



There are many great options in [Travel Sets](#). Just look at the best reviewed options in that collection. However, I must tell you about a couple more of my favorites!



For a set that's stunning and beautiful, classic, and functional, the [12" Magnetic Travel Chess Set in Rosewood](#) is so many people's favorite. Just look at the reviews. Of course the pieces are magnetic and cling well to the board for unsteady times. Although it doesn't store the pieces on the board in a way that you can pause and close it mid-game, everything else about the set is amazing. I think you can see why.

Pamela says, "I purchased this for my daughter to bring to college and it was perfect! Very nice case, also."

This gold and silver color set has a board less than 8" square, conveniently compact. My favorite aspect though is that it's extremely lightweight – less than a pound! And it looks beautiful, with strong magnets to hold the pieces in place.

Those are some of the reasons I carried this set in 2006. When I met my wife Joanna, we played a game on it, so it has good memories... and I had to include it here!

This [Plastic Magnetic Travel Set with Case](#) will surely bring you great memories as well!



## FOR BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Some chess sets are specially designed for those who are **blind or visually impaired**.

Pieces are differentiated with pegs topping one player's pieces. Half of the board squares are raised and half are lowered for tactile representation of the board.

Each piece has a peg for the square's hole, keeping them steady between moves.

The larger of the two chess sets is 15" square with 3.75" King made entirely of wood.

The smaller is 12" Square with a 3.25" King. It has a wooden board and plastic pieces.

We have found that these two sizes meet most of the desired play requirements and wishes expressed by players who use them.





## GIANT CHESS

It's one of the most entertaining ways to play and enjoy sharing chess.

25 inch tall **Giant Chess** is entertaining and fun for all ages.

- host a backyard party
- entertain guests at a resort
- enhance a recreational facility

The ways are nearly endless! Giant chess is perfect for almost any environment, backyards, campgrounds, schools, and even cruise ships.

With several ways to create your play surface, Chess House makes it easy with **several ways to finish your game**

- Create/Paint **your own surface**
- **Quick throw nylon** mat for a party and quick setup and take down on any surface
- **Snap together semi-permanent**, all weather option for hard surfaces

You can create your own chess board or buy a ready to go chess board such as the quick fold nylon or semi-permanent all weather plastic boards.

Eventually, you may need replacement pieces. Chess House makes it particularly convenient to source them.



## ELECTRONIC CHESS SETS

Because electronic chess sets are so important to the chess experience I'm going to address it in further detail in this guide.

Although chess is played significantly more on digital devices and the Internet in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is persistent and even resurging interesting in electronic chess sets as self-contained personal playing devices.

There's something about playing the game of chess on a real, physical, 3 dimensional chess board that has timeless appeal vs viewing or playing on a screen. And when there is no one available to play chess, the electronic chess computer is the answer.

Here are some reasons they are so useful today

- Providing chess play opponent when there's no one else
- Play at a level that's suitable
- Practice and improve at chess
- No Internet or need to accumulate more screen time

These days, the variety of interesting and helpful chess computers is growing with some very good options to consider depending on your goal and preferences.



All chess computers sense your move input either by pressure on the squares or automatic sensing. The computer's move is then displayed for you to complete. (With the rare exception of an automated chess board with self-moving pieces).

A chess computer ensures legal moves are made, can provide hints, and will not object if you decide to take back moves or start a new game at any point. For these reasons, it is ideal for practicing chess concepts learned elsewhere.

Most modern chess computers now come with highly sophisticated “chess engines” or play algorithms designed to mimic human play. This means many of the advantages of chess software or internet chess are built into the chess computer to provide a more natural playing style, closer to that have a real person. Historically, electronic chess games could be quite repetitive and lacking in their selection of chess moves.

### **SELECTING A SUITABLE ELECTRONIC CHESS SET**

Rather than introducing all the options, I'll tell you about some of the best designs along with who and why people enjoy them.

Introduced in 2019, **the DGT Centaur changed the way people viewed electronic chess by over simplifying the whole experience.**

You can sit down with this chess board, turn it on, and begin playing. Both yours and the computer moves are illuminated with circles on the chess board. You could take the Centaur in bright light conditions outdoors.

The Centaur automatically adapts to your level as you play so that you have a challenge or the possibility to win according to your preference.



There are only three levels from easy to maximum strength.

- The lowest level provides you with a challenge but your chances of winning are good.
- The stronger level challenges you and it will be an accomplishment if you win.
- The highest level will challenge even the top 1% of players because it's rated around 2900-3000. (For those technically savvy, it's built on the Stockfish engine)

The maximum strength level is important because it will show you what the best moves are in any position. In fact, you could setup any position from your own game or one you have seen somewhere and then let the computer analyze it or you could play it from that starting point.

By the way, this computer can last 14 hours on a single charge! That's impressive considering most other computers either need batteries or an adapter to operate.

Since launch in May of 2019, the **DGT Centaur** has become a favorite of many players who approach chess casually and just want to enjoy the game on a frequent basis. The **unboxing Centaur video** I published earlier has been very helpful for people who are curious about its features.

The Centaur is very suitable for young players as well as adults.





Next, before looking at more exclusive devices, here are my **recommendations players who are either youth, improving at chess, or generally looking for economical yet reliable electronic chess.**

Millennium in Germany makes a range of electronic chess designs, two of which I want to highlight here.

The **lowest price option** is their **Millennium Chess Champion - Master II**. We saw some upgrades to the design in 2019.

It's most commonly purchased for kids ages 8-12, sometimes adults who want an economical computer too. It's chess strength rating is around 1750 maximum. That's an intermediate club player so it will challenge all beginner and lower intermediate level players.

If you read the reviews at the link above, you'll discover that people find some even cheaper options on a major shopping site but the quality was so poor they it had to be returned. Then they found this one and have been pleased.

It's small at about 10" x 7" x 1". The pieces are nicely magnetic to hold them in place. Moves are made by pressing on the squares. The settings as well as the current chess position and moves are shown on the LCD. It operates on easily sourced batteries or an AC adapter.



Add **many more features, levels, processing power and you have the best in category, Millennium Chess Genius Pro.**

For several years in a row it has been our best-selling chess computer in the under \$200 price category. It's ideal for anyone serious about chess and improving at the game who doesn't need the luxury features found in higher priced electronic chess sets.

The Genius Pro has the most features packed into its roughly 12 x 10.5 x 1.25" size.

Despite the "space age" looking pieces which appears to be the only thing some people dislike, the computer performs well after you select the English language when first turning it on!

Genius Pro is one of the most powerful chess computers in its category, featuring the world-champion software Chess Genius by Richard Lang. It's rating is 2200 ELO (or 2400 USCF)

This model is also an upgrade version incorporating many improvements over its initial release.

Genius Pro will be the ideal computer for those who want a high level opponent to play and practice chess any time. It's a great example of an ideal chess computer in its price category.

Keep in mind though, it may not be suitable for aging people without strong eyesight. To make the moves, you must look at the LCD screen to see which move is to be played for the computer's side.



Now let's look at **a computer that's both very attractive and powerful, a luxury chess experience.**

### Millennium's Chess Genius Exclusive

combined robust chess play with good looks and ease of on board play.

For example, the moves are played naturally and sensed by the chess board automatically without the need to press on the squares. Besides, the moves are shown on each square with 4 lights surrounding each square. Each hand-carved piece has special sensors.

For those who can spend a little more than typical on an electronic chess set, this is one of the best choices. This is confirmed by the many reviews.

It's one of the most affordable luxury chess computers – perfect for solo play.

Exclusive is engineered in Germany after many years of careful listening and discussion with avid players and enthusiasts. These people helped architect the best hands-on chess game for the home. In fact, the size is comfortable at just less than 16" square.

For many more details, read the [full description with reviews](#). It can even connect with bluetooth via ChessLink for those wanting to extend the play possibilities.



## UNIQUE CHESS SETS

Among the many unique chess sets crafted worldwide, some in particular are fascinating, aesthetic and ingenious.

The **Bauhaus Chess Set** by Naef in Switzerland.

Josef Hartwig's chessmen, designed in 1923, have characteristically reduced forms which, in contrast to commonly used figures, are symbols based purely on the function and form of the maneuver of each piece.

Cubes, cylinders and spheres lead you move by move to checkmate.





Here is the **Man Ray Chess Set** by Philadelphia born artist Man Ray who created sets from 1920 until 1976. Very few of the original sets are still available for purchase.

He is hailed as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries most innovative artists. His artwork was far ahead of its time so he lived a modest life. His vision was to design a simple, straightforward, modern chess set.

Man Ray's original design was the first modern set comprised of all abstract geometric forms. Today's Man Ray sets are perfectly reproduced by craftsman both from Germany and Italy, a wonderful way to be re-introduced to the game of chess.



## WOODEN CHESS SETS

There are a wide variety of wooden chess sets available from Chess House. All of them are chosen with care or designed and paired by myself or a team member here.

Here are a few carefully selected recommendations. These will be ideal for frequent games of chess at home or if you prefer, taking with you to a club setting.

- Starter
- Ideal
- Heirloom
- Decorative

### AN ECONOMICAL STARTER SET

For those just starting out or keeping the initial investment low while still having a large, playable, and very functional chess set, I created the economical [Classic Wood Chess Set](#).

The pieces do not have sharp points, and the chessboard is a comfortable 19" square with the coordinates on the borders that help new players with replaying games. As with most sets from Chess House, replacement pieces are easy to source. The entire set is made in Poland.



## THE IDEAL CHESS SET

For a first chess set with great detail and well-finished chessmen, the [Club Chess Set Combo](#) offers club style Staunton pieces in boxwood and black ebonized wood that are handcrafted in India.

The "Club series" chessmen are the most well-known Staunton design used in clubs throughout the country. Instead of plastic, you can enjoy the look and feel of a beautiful wood grain. This set has been designed to withstand rigorous practical play while maintaining elegance. The design, quality, and craftsmanship are superior to most chessmen in its price range.

The sturdy club style design is heavily weighted and has no delicate points to break or chip. The pieces are felted for smooth play and to protect the wooden chessboard.

It comes in a variety of wood choices for both the pieces and the board.

There are more great alternatives to these pieces including the [Championship Chess Set Combo](#).

You'll find these and more in the [Wooden Chess Sets Collection](#).



## HEIRLOOM COLLECTION

Built with hardwood chess boards made in the U.S., each **Heirloom Collection Chess Set** is a unique masterpiece to enjoy for a lifetime.

Here, the **Championship** design features classic Staunton pieces used their decades of high level chess play is paired with the **JLP 21" Players Chess Board** for one of our most affordable yet luxurious chess sets for the home.

These sets or any in this collection are stunning for both display and that lovely game of chess by your fireplace.

You can get optional storage bag or boxes to add to the ways you can make it portable or protect the pieces.





## DECORATIVE

Maybe it's time to step out boldly with a unique and stylish decorative chess set.

This photo shows the **17" Large King's Chess Set**, a very stylish and unique set hand-crafted in Poland of birch and hornbeam.

The chess boards are lightweight but very unique and handsome in their styling.

See this one and many more designs in our **Decorative Wood Chess Sets Collection**.



## HOW ARE WOOD CHESS SETS MADE?

Depending on style, there are quite a variety of methods used to create chess sets. In this example, an Ambassador chess set is hand finished in Poland. The process starts with initial cutting and drying of birch and maple, and continues with stages including gluing, etching, and finally painting.



Drying, or curing wood is very important to the stability of the finished product. Here, birch wood

trees are dried, turned on a lathe to make pieces, and then stained to color.



With chessboards, veneers are used in almost all cases for a low cost, yet great looking finish. Today's technology in veneer wood finishing makes it a more than acceptable means of lowering the overall cost of production.



## WOOD CHESS PIECES

Chess pieces made from wood have, for many centuries, originated in India, where today the world's best craftsmen continue to manufacture both classic and imaginative designs.

Here are six common wood materials from dark to light wood.



Each of the darker woods shown above is paired with a **boxwood** to create a chess set with variation.

**Ebonized** pieces are made of boxwood that has been stained black.

**Ebony** is a very dark, dense, and expensive black wood. Like any wood, there are variations of colors from tree to tree and Ebony sometime has more of a dark brown tinge rather than completely black. Ebony chess sets are sought after by collectors. But they do demand a premium price. (ebenaceae diospyros melanoxylon<sup>1</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diospyros\\_melanoxylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diospyros_melanoxylon)

**Red Sandalwood** (not shown) has a wonderfully red appearance, sometimes called blood rosewood. Native to mountain ranges in South India, it is a more expensive wood also sought after by collectors for its brilliance. (pterocarpus santalinus<sup>2</sup>)

**Padauk** (now shown) is an exotic wood that starts almost crimson and oxidizes to a dark, rich, purple-brown over time. It stays redder than Rosewood and is slightly harder and heavier. (pterocarpus<sup>3</sup>).

**Rosewood** is a dark brown, usually reddish brown wood that provides the richer tones sought after by collectors. (dalbergia latifolia<sup>4</sup>)

**Shishamwood** ranges from light to medium brown in color. The wood shown is on the darker side of most shishamwood sets. It is also easy to source and therefore relatively inexpensive. (Sometimes spelled Sheeshamwood). (dalbergia sissoo<sup>5</sup>)

**Golden Rosewood** is a relatively easy to source light rosewood wood abundant in India. It comes in a variety of shades and offers one of the lightest pairings with boxwood.

**Boxwood** is an inexpensive, light wood. The light pieces of most sets of wood chess pieces are boxwood, selected for its hardness and light color. (buxus sempervirens<sup>6</sup>)

**Ebonized** sets are black stained boxwood, the most economical way to create that dark contrast with natural boxwood color.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pterocarpus\\_santalinus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pterocarpus_santalinus)

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pterocarpus>

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosewood>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalbergia\\_sissoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalbergia_sissoo)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buxus\\_sempervirens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buxus_sempervirens)



## WOOD CHESS BOARDS

Wood chess boards are predominantly either solid wood or veneer with MDF core. While solid **hardwood chess boards** are more costly to manufacturer well, they are certainly more valuable and attractive.

We have some exclusive relationships with skilled craftsmen here in the U.S. to produce a fine line of hardwood chess boards that have proven very popular with customers. These **JLP Chess Boards** are hand-made, incredibly attractive, and long-lasting.

In this hardwood line, the **21" Player's Chess Board** is the most popular. For those who remember the Drueke chess board, many people say these are even more impressive and well crafted.



You can buy some very nice veneer boards and the reality is most boards today are made with veneer. The processes for veneer production has improved substantially in recent years but results vary widely and we are careful about which manufacturers to source from.

MDF (medium density fiberboard) brings down the cost substantially and still has a wonderful appearance. In fact, manufacturers using the latest technology in veneer finishing in addition to high quality control standards are producing some wonderful chess boards.

See for example, this Ferrer product made in Spain, **Deluxe Tiger Maple and Ebony Chess Board**.

Not all veneer chessboards are made the same, however, so be on the lookout for something that will meet your expectations adequately.



## COORDINATES

Letters and numbers along the margin of many chessboards are the coordinate system for naming the squares, sometimes referred to as “algebraic notation”.

Chessboards for learning or competition often have letters and numbers along each side with 1-8 horizontal ranks and A-H vertical files creating a coordinate system for recording a chess game on paper or electronically. The lower left square is A1 and the upper right square is H8 , with all the squares having their own coordinate name.

Nearly all **club style** chessboards will have these algebraic coordinates. The coordinate system is best for beginners since it helps in writing down or replaying moves. With experience, players learn the names of all 64 squares and don't depend on the coordinates much if at all.

These coordinates help players record their games move by move on a game recording sheet often called a “**scoresheet**”.

With a personal library of games, you can review them later with a coach. Many chess rules for competitive chess depend on an accurately recorded chess game. In fact, in competition, when a specific number of moves is reached, such as the 40<sup>th</sup> move, often used for a time control where a predetermined 2 hours is allowed for the first 40 moves and 1 hour is remaining for the rest of the game.

Here's an article that explains [How to Read and Write Chess Notation](#)



# IDEAS FOR PARENTS

## LEARNING & FUN

Chess is fun and sharpens young minds. Parents can encourage their children to study chess, thereby experiencing transforming positive benefits for the brain.

Effective learning involves stimulating more senses simultaneously. In addition to sight and sound, touching and moving the pieces reinforces learning. That's why a real chessboard along with suitable training aids is encouraged over solely on screen visuals.

Starting on the [Home & Family](#) page, several chess learning kits and resources are available that combine the ideal chess set and training resource.

### A KID'S FIRST CHESS SET

The [Basic Club Chess Set](#) is what I recommend for practicing at home as well as practicing with fellow students, and competing at the club and scholastic tournament. They'll become familiar with their set, so it's a good idea to introduce them to a set they can take to a scholastic event.

Even if you do not have plans for chess class, this set is what we recommend for the home. It's essentially indestructible and the pieces if lost are easily replaced by Chess House. After all, you will have this set in the home where other youngsters or pets may wish to play with it as well.

A bag accessory will help keep all 32 pieces together, along with a rolled up board.





# IDEAS FOR PLAYERS

## CLUB & TOURNAMENT

A club chess set is the most common for club and tournament play. Most clubs recommend that you bring your own chess set. Many tournaments however will have chess sets ready to play. After you complete your match, you will put the pieces back in place for the next round.

It's a good idea to bring your own **club chess set** for practice or review between matches.

ALWAYS use a standard design chess set usually known as Staunton. Do not use themed pieces or anything unusual, else you invite some odd glances.

You may however bring a set of correctly sized (3 ¾" or 4") wood chessmen and offer to play with wood instead. Others might welcome the chance to play in a better chess set.

Just keep in mind that during competition a chess game may become fast and furious if time is running out and you need to allow your set to take the heat of battle!

The set shown here is our **Quality Club Flex Pad Chess Set Combo**. It offers a solid unweighted, quality piece, with an upgraded club style board called the Flex Pad. The combo includes a bag to carry it all.



## UPGRADING YOUR CLUB SET

Many players like to own various sets of chess pieces that are better than the basic club pieces. There are designs with more weight and different styles. Several interesting possibilities exist. Here are a few and the reasons to consider each one.

**Heavy Club & Tournament Chess Pieces** add chess pieces with extra weight. This is the lowest cost upgrade, an easy way to improve on the weight and feel of your chessmen in play. In fact it's good for fast play due to the added stability. It comes with two extra queens.



**Inspiration Series Chessmen** are a heavily weighted, large, and fun chess set to play. They have a somewhat youthful look and feel but they are enjoyed by players of all ages. With the extra weight they are perfect for blitz, ideally on the Flex pad chessboard.



To compare plastic pieces and specs in detail, see the [Plastic Chess Pieces Comparison](#) page.

# IDEAS FOR HOME

When selecting a chess set for the home, consider

- Who will play and how often the chess set will be played
- Aesthetics and fitting with the décor

A **marble** set as shown here or an **alabaster** chess set looks amazing in many different settings and is ideal for casual and occasional games.

Generally **stone chess sets** are a good idea when the set is predominantly on display and not played every day.

In the home, often pets will be curious and play with the pieces if they are left out on display. There are various storage options available.



Remember, it's easy to get replacement pieces from Chess House though should you ever need them.

Let's say you'll be playing a chess set often and yet want a set that looks amazing on display. That's where the **Heirloom set** not only looks amazing, it's better for frequent games. You can see that the quality of the board is superb and the pieces are highly detailed and perfectly matched.





If you'd like something small, decorative and enjoyable to play, consider a small **11" Florentine Chess Set on Leatherette Cabinet Board** with metal chess pieces and a King just 2". The storage is extra helpful.



One of the most exciting ways to express some creativity is in combining chess with a theme of interest with one of the many [theme chess sets](#) available.





Theme chess sets are fun and interesting and can make exciting birthday gifts, anniversary gifts, and holiday presents, allowing you to cater to specific appreciation of a loved one. Most theme sets are polystone, a compound made largely of polyurethane resin mixed with powdered stone additives that give it added weight and the porcelain or "stone-like" feel. It's durable and highly effective at maintaining a sharp paint finish.

**Studio Anne Carlton** and **Berkeley Chess** make sets entirely in the United Kingdom. They are beautiful and highly detailed themed sets.



Encouraging a child's interest or even teaching a history lesson is possible with so many unique, clever, and sometimes bizarre **chess set themes**.





# ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

## PAIRING CHESS PIECES AND BOARDS

Many chess sets are already paired as a set of pieces and a board. You will find, however, that chess pieces and boards are very often available on their own. This allows you the choice of pairing up your favorites.

With hundreds of choices it could be overwhelming, so here are **some ideas to get you started on pairing your own chess sets**. You'll often find as well that chess pieces or boards have recommended pairs throughout the store.



Plastic pieces with  
club style roll up  
board



Theme pieces with  
deluxe walnut  
maple



Players wood  
pieces with  
premium wood



Unique, decorative  
with storage



## HOW TO FIT CHESS PIECES TO A BOARD

As a general rule the King base diameter of a Staunton design chess piece is about 3/4 of the square size. If you follow this as a guideline, you'll find that the pieces will fit well.

For non-regulation play you can of course deviate from this as you wish, yet the guideline is useful. A smaller square size relative to the pieces will create a denser or crowded feel, while a larger square size will create the opposite effect, a more open playing field.

The U.S. Chess Federation's Rules of Chess, 5th edition, says, regarding board size, (41C page 227): "The guideline for determining the proper square size for a Staunton chess set is that the King should occupy around 78% of the square. (Dividing the base diameter of the King by 0.78 will yield the proper square size). An acceptable square size may be up to 1/8 inch larger than this number, but not smaller."



Therefore, a chessboard with 2" Squares will fit well with a King's base of near 1.5" (75% of 2"). For a 1.75" King base, divide by .78 which is approximately 2.25", the recommended square size.



**(67%)** Regulation Chess Set with 1 1/2" King base and Vinyl board 20" Square and 2 1/4" squares.



**(84%)** Club Chess Pieces with 1 1/2" King base and 17" Vinyl board with 1 7/8" square. The same club pieces can be played on a smaller surface.



**(73%)** Timeless pieces with 1 7/16" King base on 18" US Made wood chess board with 1 15/16" squares.



**(72%)** Timeless pieces with 1 7/16" King base on 21" USA Solid Hardwood Walnut and Maple Chess board with 2" squares.



For unique or theme chess pieces other than Staunton style, such as a civil war chess set, these are still good guidelines, but the piece shape can affect the ideal size. A full body horse with a mounted solider may reach beyond the square. In this example, the king's base size is actually 58% of the square.

**(58%)** Civil War Chess Set with 1" King base and 1 5/8" Square. The knight piece balances extra square size.

## Extra queens?

A normal chess game has 32 pieces. With extra queen, it may come with 34. Extra Queens are not required but have become popular thanks to the special chess move “pawn promotion” in which you may promote the pawn that makes it across the chessboard without being captured – into a Queen, Rook, Knight, or Bishop. A Queen is usually chosen since she is the most powerful player. Since it’s possible to play a game with an extra queen on the board, extra queens are becoming more prevalent.

## What is “Staunton”?

Staunton is the visual design of the most familiar chess pieces in the last 150 years. The term usually refers to any variation of pieces that even loosely resembles those shown here. This would exclude, character, theme, or other unique sets.

Howard Staunton was an English chess master who lived from 1810 to 1874, and was in fact nearly the best player between 1843 and 1851. He promoted a chess set of clearly distinguishable pieces of standardized shape that is still the style used for competitions. He was also the principal organizer of the first international chess tournament in 1851 in England.<sup>7</sup>



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<sup>7</sup>Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard\\_Staunton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard_Staunton)



### **Is a chess set rare or valuable?**

Some chess sets are valuable for their rarity or material. Others are valuable for their story or provenance. Either way, the history of a work is essential to estimating the value even if it's a known, collectable design. Quality, condition, and workmanship will also determine the value.

Most often though, the value connected with a set is in relation to the story of its acquisition and preservation. With this in mind, it's always wise to keep a family heirloom in the family for as long as possible and to record the story. A chess set is far more interesting when it can be traced back to the origin of acquisition and through its existence. I have a set that was hand carved in the Oregon back-country in 1914 by my great grandfather. The set would appear relatively worthless if found at a garage sale. Yet, since it's part of my family history it's valuable to me.

Often, however, this question of value is asked for resale purposes. This is then determined by the marketability. If it's a known design, the best way is to research past sales, usually on a marketplace like Ebay. If the design is not known, you can check with an expert like Frank at [www.chessantiques.com](http://www.chessantiques.com)

### **Why are coordinates on some chess boards?**

Players who are starting out or learning chess will find these helpful. Boards with letter and number coordinates help players record or replay games in chess shorthand notation. Notation pads, or scorebooks, are used to write down moves for official game record keeping. This is required in rated events.

The coordinates are most helpful to beginning players. Advanced players have learned the coordinate names of the squares and don't need to rely on the notation. Still, it can be both helpful as much as aesthetic.

### **Why weighted pieces?**

Many players prefer chess pieces with extra weight. Steel is secured inside the chess piece base to add various amounts of weight. This brings the center of gravity lower, adding stability. That's helpful in tournament or rapid games.

### **Why are most club boards green?**

Most clubs and tournaments use green chess boards due to studies that show that the color green helps with concentration. It's the most calming to the mind. Can you imagine why trees, grass, and natural environments seem peaceful? Red on the other hand is bold and with time, will be more aggravating. Still, it can be great to have color options to match school colors or for other reasons.

### **What's the ideal chess board size for my pieces?**

When choosing a chessboard for your chess pieces, the general rule is to make sure the base diameter of the King (or largest piece) is more or less 75% of the chessboard's square size.

### **What do I need for club or competition?**

When choosing a chess set for club or competition, make sure the pieces are 3  $\frac{3}{4}$ " or at most 4" tall and Staunton style. The pieces should be paired with an appropriately sized chessboard with squares around 2 to 2  $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

### **What equipment do I need for a class?**

If you're planning to teach a class, there are chess boards that fit on desks, hanging chessboards visible to the entire classroom, and other teaching aids. This [School](#) page will help you explore and starting a chess instruction program.

### **What if space is limited or we have smaller desks?**

If you need to fit a set on a smaller surface (classroom desk), pair the club chess set with a 14" or 17" vinyl board instead of the standard 20".

# 5 TIPS FOR BUYING THE IDEAL CHESS SET

In 25 years of helping people select a chess set they will enjoy because it's not only suited but of appropriate quality, **here's what really matters.**

1. Make sure the company where you buy your chess set can support any need for **replacement parts** months or many years in the future. Is the company easy to reach by email and phone? Are the return policies generous?
2. Check the store's **reputation** in the form of ratings and reviews. With a company like Chess House, the team is dedicated to your success and capable of addressing any situation that arises. The tens of thousands of reviews earned are evidence towards your assurance of delight.
3. Avoid **overpaying** by falling for big "sales" some stores publish. By comparing, you'll often find that Chess House prices are a better deal since a fair price is given and more time is spent serving you than on sales tactics.
4. You **won't know inferior** quality until you've had a chance to compare. We've compared many suppliers of goods and we often pay more to source a better product even though it may be hard to distinguish a difference from photos. We want the product to be the best in its class so it will serve you well.
5. Get a **personalized recommendation**. This chess sets guide may be exactly what you need to help you make a choice on your first or next chess set. But if you're ever wondering, just ask the team. One of us will be delighted to help you make a decision based on your unique needs and interests. Just reach out!



# YOUR TURN!

My vision with Chess House is placing chess in every home to not just have fun with the game, but to equip young and old to be mentally healthy and ready to make a difference in lives and relationships.

I hope you enjoyed this guide and that choosing the ideal chess set is now much clearer. Shopping [ChessHouse.com](https://ChessHouse.com) should be enjoyable from start to finish!

I want you to be thrilled with your chess set and your entire experience. In fact, so thrilled that you will share Chess House with others too!

If I haven't answered your questions in a great way as you go through the guide, please send me a note at [raphael@chesshouse.com](mailto:raphael@chesshouse.com).

Raphael Neff  
Chess House owner, co-founder and enthusiast